# 10 Tips for Writing an Effective Success Story





### 10 Tips

- 1. Write for your reader, not yourself.
- 2. Develop an angle.
- 3. Create an emotional hook.
- 4. Don't back into or bury your lead.
- 5. Avoid wordiness and run-on sentences.
- 6. Focus on facts not fluff.
- 7. Follow the 80/20 rule.
- 8. Follow the format.
- 9. Give it a rest.
- 10. Remember, success stories are the tip of the program's iceberg!





## Tip 1: Write for your reader, not yourself

Your reader is interested in his or her cause, not your program or project!

- Your success story must appeal to
  - Decision makers
  - Tax payers
  - Reporters
- •To increase appeal:
  - •Use state, county or regional data instead of national data to describe the problem.
  - Identify the specific geographic areas that benefit from your program.





### Tip 1: Write for your reader, not yourself cont'd.

#### Continually ask --- Did Minority Health Initiative Grant Funds

- •Save the reader time, money or effort?
- •Improve the health of the readers or those they care about?
- •Educate and inform the readers about a health problem or concern that could affect them or their family?
- •Provide information that makes the readers look good or keeps them from looking bad, for example reducing insurance claims or containing a disease outbreak that if not contained would cause loss of confidence in the public health system as well as potential loss of lives.





## Tip 2: Develop an angle

- When identifying an angle, ask yourself what it is that you want your reader to think, do, or feel after reading your story. Examples of angles include
  - human interest.
  - startling or interesting (to your reader) facts/statistics.
  - inventive approaches or solutions.
- As you write, frequently re-read what you have written and ask yourself "what is this story about?"

The most original authors are not so because they advance what is new, but because they put what they have to say as if it had never been said before. -- Johann Wolfgang von Goethe





### Tip 3: Create an emotional hook

- Paint a picture of the people behind the facts
  - Who was at risk?
  - Who was suffering?
  - Who was outraged?

"Good stories cut through the clutter and connect with people's hearts, opening their minds to our point of view." Andy Goodman, author Why Bad Ads Happen to Good Causes





# Example— Dietary Supplement Use Leads to Hospitalization in El Paso County

Example Tip 3— Create an Emotional Hook:

"Four teenage boys in El Paso County, Colorado, were admitted to hospitals after consuming a dietary supplement marketed as Green Hornet.'"

Colorado Success Story, 2005





# Example— PHHS Block Grant Dollars Help to Make Arizona Sun Wise

Example Tip 3—Create an Emotional Hook:

"Arizona statistics show a 150 percent increase in melanoma (a potentially deadly form of skin cancer) since 1973, and a 44 percent increase in deaths from melanoma. Nationwide, children as young as 11 years old are being diagnosed with deadly skin cancers, and according to the Skin Cancer Foundation, 'Just one blistering sunburn in childhood is estimated to double the risk of getting melanoma later in life.'"

Arizona Success Story, 2004





# Example— Block Grant Funds Help to Protect Low-Income Families in Alabama

Example Tip 3— Create an Emotional Hook:

"Failing septic tanks place about 340,000 low-income persons in rural Alabama that use well water at risk for waterborne disease. In fact, in years 2003--2004 Alabama received national media coverage when three low-income families were forced to live in tents in rural Lowndes County due to shared septic tank failures."

Alabama Success Story, 2005





## Tip 4: Don't bury or back into the lead

Engage the reader early on. Be direct.

#### **Before**

Arkansas overall seat belt usage rate was 52.4% and the child safety seat usage rate was 64.8% in the year 2000, far below the national average. Overall, more children aged 0—4 are killed by unintentional injuries than by all childhood diseases combined.

#### After

More children aged 0 to 14 are killed by unintentional injuries than by all childhood diseases combined.





# Tip 5: Avoid wordiness, run on sentences and jargon

Eliminate unnecessary words and sentences. Be concise and to the point.

#### Before – Avoid Wordiness

 PHHS Block Grant funds are used to provide population-based prevention services to reduce tobacco use by adults.

#### After – Avoid Wordiness

PHHS Block Grant funds are used to reduce tobacco use by adults.

It is my ambition to say in ten sentences; what others say in a whole book. -- Nietzsche





# Tip 5: Avoid wordiness, run on sentences, and jargon cont'd.

#### Avoid run on sentences:

#### Before— Run on sentences

 PHHS Block Grant funds are used to present 31 basic and advanced level Emergency Medical Services (EMS) classes in communities statewide during the 2003 fiscal year thereby insuring that an adequate pool of personnel are available to staff the local community ambulance services.

#### After— Run on sentences

 In 2003, PHHS Block Grant funds were used to carry out 31 basic and advanced level Emergency Medical Services (EMS) classes in communities statewide. Courses insure that a well trained pool of personnel are available to staff local community ambulance services.





# Tip 5: Avoid wordiness, run-on sentences, and jargon cont'd.

Avoid using public health industry jargon when writing for a non-public health audience:

- "...participants entered into the program to set and achieve goals related to risk reduction and disease management based on the chronic care model."
- "The outcomes of this pilot project demonstrate improved health outcomes by reducing risk..."
- "The NKFM has begun two managed care pilots (HAP and MCARE) to address the problem."





### Tip 6: Focus on facts, not fluff

- Broad sweeping statements and grandiose words can destroy the credibility of your story. Know the facts about your program and clearly state what you know.
  - What is the health burden in dollars, loss of life, decreased quality of life? (Issue)
  - How many people are affected? (Issue)
  - Over what period of time has the problem existed? (Issue)
  - Who carried out the intervention? (Intervention)
  - What percent of program activities are supported with Block Grant dollars? (Intervention)
  - What were the <u>specific outcomes</u> how much money was saved, how many people did the intervention impact, how many lives were saved, to what extent were efficiencies increased? (Impact)





### Tip 7: Follow the 80/20 rule to effective writing

- 80% is research and planning, 20% is writing.
  - Use the internet to---
    - Develop facts,
    - Develop an angle,
    - Talk your idea through with someone not familiar with your program as well as with those familiar with your program.





### Tip 8: Follow the format

- Make the story easy on the eyes.
  - Use white space to reduce the density of the text.
  - Use bullets to highlight important points. In some instances only the bullets will be read.
  - Keep your story to one page.





### Tip 9: Give it a rest

- One of the best ways to write well is to put what you have written aside for a day and then re-read your story with a fresh mind.
  - What seemed clear the night before might standout the next day as fuzzy or confused,
  - What seemed profound might seem trivial,
  - Or, you will confirm that what you have written is right on and ready to go!

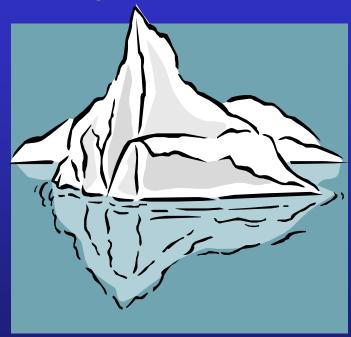
"The waste basket is the writer's best friend."
Isacc Bashevis Singer (Polish born American writer 1904 to 1991)





# Tip 10: Remember, Success Stories are the tip of the program iceberg!

- Writing success stories is a powerful process. Suggestions-
  - Write a "mock up" success story before you design your program.
  - If you're already implementing, stop now and write a story that describes projected outcomes.
  - Ask every program to write a story for the objectives that they fund with Block Grant dollars.



Does your program capture **outcomes**?





# Section 4 Grantee Example Success Stories Before & After

"Hard writing makes easy reading."
Wallace Stegner American Novelist 1909—1993

Many thanks to Pennsylvania and South Carolina for their Example Success Stories.





# **Before--**Pennsylvania Department of Health Injury Prevention Program Success Story

#### Issue:

Pennsylvania faces the same challenges as other states in reducing injuries and deaths related to residential fires among young children under age five and older adults over age 55.

#### PA Baseline Data:

While resident deaths due to fire and flames have decreased, fire-related injuries have increased. Between 1998 and 2002, the number and the age-adjusted rate for resident deaths due to fire and flames have been decreasing. The number of deaths declined by 34 percent – from 179 to 119. The mortality rate has decreased from 1.4 to .9 (PA Dept. of Health, Bureau of Health Statistics and Research). Since 2000, the rate for fire-related injuries has increased from 15.7 to 16.1 in 2002 (Injuries in Pennsylvania: Hospital Discharges 2002, PA Dept. of Health).





# Before -- Pennsylvania Department of Health Injury Prevention Contd.

#### Intervention:

The Pennsylvania Department of Health has implemented a fire and burn prevention program targeted to reducing residential fire deaths among young children under age 5 and older adults over age 55. The program provides 10 year lithium battery powered smoke detectors and fire prevention education through a collaborative project with the district offices of the State Health Department, municipal health departments, and PA SAFE KIDS.

In Bedford County in the Southcentral District, Head Start conducts home visits for Early Head Start families. As part of their visits, fire safety is addressed and families in need of a smoke detector receive one to install with the assistance of the home visitor. 200 smoke detectors were distributed district wide with 20 being distributed in Bedford County.





# Before - Pennsylvania Department of Health Injury Prevention Contd.

#### Impact:

One of the families in Bedford County, visited by a Head Start home visitor and had received a smoke detector and fire safety education, had a fire in their home while they were sleeping. The fire was in the bedroom, the smoke detector sounded enabling them to wake up, and they escape unharmed. The family credits the smoke detector with saving their lives.





#### After - Smoke Detector Saves Lives in Bedford County, PA

#### Issue:

In 2001, there were 915 cases of hospitalization and deaths related to fires resulting in \$19,183,671 in medical costs and \$133,400,453 in productivity costs. Smoke detectors save lives, especially the lives of children under age five and adults over age 55 who have an increased risk of fire-related injuries and deaths in their homes.

- While resident deaths due to fire and flames have decreased, firerelated injuries have increased. Smoke detectors have helped Pennsylvanians to survive what were once deadly fires.
- Between 1998 and 2002, the number of resident deaths due to fire and flames declined by 34 percent – from 179 to 119, rate has decreased from 1.4 to .9 (PA Dept. of Health, Bureau of Health Statistics and Research).
- Since 2000, the rate of fire-related injuries has increased from 15.7 to 16.1 in 2002 (Injuries in Pennsylvania: Hospital Discharges 2002, PA Dept. of Health).





#### After - Smoke Detector Saves Lives in Bedford County, PA

#### Intervention:

Through PHHS Block Grant funding, the Pennsylvania Department of Health has implemented a fire and burn prevention program to reduce residential fire deaths:

- Targets young children under age five and older adults over age 55;
- Delivered through the collaboration of district health offices, local health departments, PA SAFE KIDS, and a variety of community partners; Distributes 10year lithium battery powered smoke detectors; and,
- All smoke detector distribution includes fire prevention education and installation assistance.





#### After - Smoke Detector Saves Lives in Bedford County, PA

#### Impact:

In Bedford County, the District Health Office partners with Head Start to conduct home visits for Early Head Start families. As part of their visits, fire safety is addressed and families in need of a smoke detector receive one to install with the assistance of the home visitor.

 Two hundred (200) smoke detectors were distributed district wide with 20 being distributed in Bedford County.

Based on data from the Children's Safety Network Economics and Data Analysis Resource Center:

- For the investment of \$33 for each smoke detector purchased and installed, \$940 in benefits is saved for each person that has been spared injury or death because of a smoke detector.
- In 2003-2004, 4,403 smoke detectors, at about the cost of \$145,299, were distributed in Pennsylvania saving \$4,138,820 in medical, productivity, quality of life benefits.

To underline the success of this program, a smoke detector that was installed in a Bedford county Head Start home sounded when a fire started in the bedroom. The family credits this program with saving their lives.





#### Issue:

In South Carolina, at least one in five children are overweight or obese with a trend for the number of children affected to increase. Surveillance data shows 26% of low-income children in our state, between two and five years of age, are overweight or at risk of becoming overweight.

- Childhood obesity has risen to a point that it can be considered a modern day epidemic. The percentage of school age children 6 11 that are overweight has more than doubled between the late 70's and 2000.
- Type 2 Diabetes, previously considered an adult disease, has increased dramatically in children who are overweight or obese.





#### Intervention:

SCDHEC used Prevention Block Grant funds in 2003 to support the implementation of the Color Me Healthy Preschool Curriculum. This national award winning program is designed to reach children ages four and five by providing innovative and interactive learning opportunities focusing on the importance of healthy eating habits and physical activity.

- •A public health educator from Appalachia III was chosen to attend the national training for the Color Me Healthy curriculum and became certified as the South Carolina state training coordinator;
  - Sixty (60) teacher kits were purchased for distribution to teachers statewide for the first year pilot;
  - The state training coordinator trained fifteen regional trainers from across the state;
  - Partnerships were established with the SC Early Childhood Education Association and SC First Steps in promoting Color Me Healthy to their membership;
  - Clemson University Cooperative Extension Service has also partnered with DHEC in the implementation of this curriculum by providing staff as regional trainers;





#### **Intervention Continued**

- Regional trainers have partnered with local First Steps to provide Color Me Healthy training to First Step childcare providers, First Steps also funded the purchase of additional teacher kits so that an even larger percentage of their staff could be trained in this curriculum;
- Partnering with the Center for Child Care Career Development for the SC Child Care Training Registry has resulted in childcare providers being eligible to receive 4 hours of continuing education credit for Color Me Healthy training;
- Partnership was developed with a local congregational nursing program to implement the curriculum in several churches serving disparate populations;

The Department of Health And Environmental Control health risk reduction staff have been working in partnership with state-level obesity prevention staff to develop an evaluation tool to provide process and impact evaluation information to help in DHEC's efforts to expand this curriculum beyond this pilot intervention.





#### Impact:

- Fifteen (15) regional trainers have been trained;
- Regional trainers have trained approximately 110 childcare providers and preschool teachers;
- During the pilot year, over 2000 children will participate in the Color Me Healthy curriculum with several components of the curriculum designed to reach parents and caregivers;
- The congregational nursing program plans to reach 25 local churches.





# After - Curriculum Jumpstarts Healthy Habits in South Carolina's Preschoolers

#### Issue

As director of Advent Children's Center in Spartanburg, S.C., Kathie Borowski grew accustomed to preschoolers unpacking potato chips and honey buns at lunchtime. For the past several years, the school, which serves 145 infants through 4-year-olds, has enrolled at least one severely obese child per term.

- In South Carolina, 26% of low-income children between 2 and 5 years old are overweight or at risk of becoming overweight.
- Type 2 Diabetes, previously considered an adult disease, increased dramatically in overweight children.
- One result: the state's obesity-related medical costs topped \$1 billion in 2003.





## After - Curriculum Jumpstarts Healthy Habits in South Carolina's Preschoolers

#### Intervention

The South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC) is working to stop these alarming statistics in their tracks. Thanks to an investment of \$12,540 from the PHHS Block Grant that funded the entire pilot program, children and parents like the ones from Advent Children's Center in Spartanburg are now learning the importance of healthy eating habits and physical activity through an initiative called Color Me Healthy. The nutrition and physical activity education curriculum designed for 4- and 5-year-olds teaches children through lively, interactive classroom lessons. Parents are engaged through newsletters featuring nutritious recipes and take-home activity bags filled with jump ropes and balls.

- To reach disparate populations, such as low-income families and African-Americans, DHEC collaborated with the Congregational Nursing Program of the Spartanburg Area, a faith-based program that uses registered nurses to provide health-related education;
- A public health educator from Spartanburg County, one of the state's most populated areas, attended the national training for Color Me Healthy and was certified as the state training coordinator; and
- Sixty teacher kits were bought and distributed to teachers statewide.





## After - Curriculum Jumpstarts Healthy Habits in South Carolina's Preschoolers

#### **Impact**

At Advent Children's Center, preschoolers are now excited about munching on crunchy vegetables; parents participated in healthy cooking classes; and, at parents' request, structured physical education time has doubled to two 30-minute periods per week. Similar improvements throughout the state include:

- More than 7,660 children in rural and urban areas participated in Color Me Healthy. The program reached Head Start programs, faith-based and public preschools, and private day care centers.
- Seventy parish nurses were trained, reaching 50 Spartanburg County churches, including African Methodist Episcopal, Baptist and Presbyterian. Other congregational nursing programs throughout the state have expressed interest in Color Me Healthy; and a training session is planned for Columbia.



